



Independent Thinking: AI Plus. Generals purged. China's leaders plan for 2030

The Architecture of Paramount Leadership

As of late 2025, the political governance of the People's Republic of China is defined by a deep consolidation of authority within a centralized leadership structure. At the peak of this hierarchy is Xi Jinping, who holds the three most critical offices: General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and President of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This concentration of power, often referred to as a "trinity" of roles, grants him paramount leadership over the party-state, the armed forces, and the executive branch. The institutional mechanisms of the CCP have been further refined to ensure the party exercises overall leadership over all areas of endeavor across the country, effectively subordinating state agencies to political and ideological imperatives.

The current ruling paradigm is centered on Xi Jinping as the "core" of the CCP Central Committee and the entire party, a designation reaffirmed during the 20th National Congress in 2022. This model represents a significant departure from the collective leadership structures that characterized the late 20th century. Authority is further reinforced by the 2018 removal of presidential term limits, allowing for an indefinite tenure. National strategy is increasingly formulated through high-level commissions, often chaired by the General Secretary himself, which bypass traditional ministerial hierarchies to direct policy in domains such as national security and financial reform.

The Inner Circle: The Politburo Standing Committee

While the General Secretary holds ultimate authority, day-to-day governance is managed by the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). The current PSC, established in 2022, consists entirely of individuals regarded as close allies or loyalists of the General Secretary. Each member oversees a specific pillar of the party-state architecture to ensure that central directives are transmitted through the vast bureaucracy.

1. Li Qiang serves as the second-ranking official and leads the State Council as Premier. He manages the economy and finance, navigating China's transition from a growth model centered on investment and real estate to one built on techno-industrial prowess.
2. Zhao Leji serves as the Chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, overseeing legislative initiatives and "rule-by-law" efforts.
3. Wang Huning chairs the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and focuses on ideological development and United Front coordination.
4. Cai Qi serves as the First Secretary of the CCP Secretariat and Director of the CCP General Office. Effectively acting as the General Secretary's chief of staff, he manages access to top leadership and oversees routine operations of the Politburo.
5. Ding Xuexiang is the Executive Vice Premier of the State Council, with a primary focus on science, technology, and industrial modernization.
6. Li Xi serves as the Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), leading the far-reaching anti-corruption campaign that remains a defining feature of the current administration.

The 2025 Fourth Plenum: Personnel Turmoil and Purges

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee, held from October 20 to 23, 2025, served as a critical juncture for the administration. The meeting was marked by extensive personnel turnover and the largest removal of senior officials from the Central Committee since 2017. Official reports confirmed the expulsion of 11 full Central Committee members and four alternate members, reflecting the vigor of the ongoing anti-corruption campaign within the party's upper echelons.

The purges left their most conspicuous mark on the military high command. Eight members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) ranks were ousted in the week surrounding the plenum. This personnel volatility resulted in the lowest attendance rate for a plenum in the post-Mao era, with only 168 of the original 205 full members present. Conspicuous absences of several other members suggest that internal investigations remain active and that further purges may be imminent.

Restructuring the Military Command

The relationship between the party and the military is governed by the principle that "the party commands the gun," with the CMC serving as the supreme organ for military affairs. Recent purges have hollowed out the customary structure of the CMC, which traditionally consists of six members in addition to the chair. By late 2025, the commission was reduced to only four active members, including the Chairman.

Notable changes and vacancies in the military command include:

- The elevation of General Zhang Shengmin to CMC Vice Chairman. Previously the head of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission, Zhang effectively serves as the military's top anti-corruption watchdog. His appointment endowments the CMC with a structure where one vice chairman is responsible for party affairs while the other,

General Zhang Youxia, focuses on operational matters.

- The removal of sitting CMC Vice Chairman He Weidong, who was among the 14 officials expelled from the party.
- The purging of high-profile figures such as Miao Hua, the former chief of the CMC Political Work Department.
- Vacancies in critical roles, including the position of Defense Minister and the leadership of the Political Work Department.

The removal of theater commanders responsible for critical areas like the Eastern and Southern Theater Commands has raised questions among international analysts regarding strategic military readiness. Despite this turnover, the leadership has continued to promote younger officers to maintain the operational integrity of these commands.

The 15th Five-Year Plan: A Shift to Economic Security

The Fourth Plenum provided the core recommendations for the 15th Five-Year Plan (FYP), which will guide China's development from 2026 to 2030. These recommendations signal a definitive shift in the economic development model, moving away from nominal GDP growth toward a focus on economic security and technological sovereignty.

The upcoming plan reorders national priorities, placing the building of a modern industrial system—including advanced manufacturing and aerospace—as the top priority. High-level technological self-reliance, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, and quantum computing, is ranked second. This shift reflects Beijing's desire to build a resilient economy capable of weathering "dangerous storms" and insulating manufacturing supply chains against international pressures.

The leadership has also introduced the concept of "New Quality Productive Forces," which emphasizes integrating advanced manufacturing with the "AI Plus Initiative". The overarching goal is for China to become a global champion in innovation, not only producing technology but also defining its frontiers and global standards.

Social Governance and Economic Stability

On the economic front, the party leadership remains cautious about expanding welfare commitments or implementing massive fiscal stimulus. Instead, consumption is identified as a secondary outcome to be achieved through improving the productive side of the economy and raising household incomes. A significant theme in the 2025 agenda is the campaign against "involution" (nèijuǎn), or the excessive competition and overproduction that have affected high-tech industries.

In terms of social governance, the CCP is building a new model that merges grassroots mobilization with modern digital surveillance. This "grid system" is designed to subdivide jurisdictions into small zones for regular activity reporting, allowing the state to monitor and respond to dissent more effectively. The party maintains a rigid social order, branding certain liberal behaviors as moral deviations that could undermine state unity.

Institutional Reforms and Party-State Integration

Between 2023 and 2025, the CCP overhauled the functional configuration of party and state institutions to meet the requirements of "Chinese-style modernization". Full implementation of these reforms has resulted in a system where the party directly manages key regulatory and social functions.

New functional departments and commissions include:

- The Central Financial Commission (CFC), which serves as the top designer for financial stability and effectively subordinates the central bank and regulators to a party-led body.
- The Central Science and Technology Commission (CSTC), which coordinates national scientific research and military-civilian integration.
- The Central Social Work Department, tasked with strengthening the party's grassroots presence in private companies and urban communities.

These changes have institutionalized a model where the government bureaucracy acts as the "shadow" of the party. All state-owned enterprises and many private financial institutions now have elevated CCP committees that are legally required to lead decision-making processes.

Future Outlook and Vulnerabilities

As China prepares to enter 2026, its leadership structure appears more consolidated than at any point in the post-Mao era. However, this centralization creates significant long-term risks. The lack of a designated successor to Xi Jinping remains a primary vulnerability, as authoritarian systems without clear transition plans are often prone to power struggles.

Furthermore, the vigorous anti-corruption drive has created a climate of fear that may impede effective governance. The concentration of power in a small group of loyalists risks creating an information silo where top leaders do not receive accurate feedback from the ground level. The success of the 15th Five-Year Plan will depend on the party's ability to achieve technological breakthroughs while managing slowing domestic growth and international isolation. The durability of this political model will ultimately rely on how well the leadership navigates these economic, political, and internal security risks.